

**University of Akron Three-Year Action Plan**  
*As endorsed by Board of Trustees*  
**December 5, 2018**

**Creating, Pursuing and Sharing Knowledge** is the essence of what The University of Akron (UA) offers our students, wherever they may be in their educational path – just out of high school, a veteran returning from service, an adult wanting to finish a degree, a worker wanting to progress in her/his career, a college graduate seeking an advanced degree. Throughout this journey, our students are supported by faculty who are engaged and committed to their success, providing them with knowledge about their subject areas while generating new knowledge through research to advance their fields of study and contribute to the growth of our region, our state, our nation, and the world. Critical to this process is our strong commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity, both with regard to our student body and to the supportive community within the University which serves them, guiding them to timely graduation with a wide range of opportunities and personal assistance, focused on enhancing career-readiness for each individual student. The knowledge that is generated – both transmitted to students and new knowledge resulting from research – is connected to the broader community through productive partnerships between the University and companies and organizations throughout the region, working together to achieve common goals.

**Developing the Three-year Action Plans**

Having completed two data-driven University-wide reviews of current offerings and operations – Academic Program Review and Administrative Activities Review – UA is now positioned to establish its plan for the next three years, outlining the important decisions and actions that are needed to help the University be distinctive in a crowded, competitive higher education landscape. This plan is designed to align University resources to build on notable areas of strength, generate more revenue resulting from greater attraction of students to those areas, prioritize areas of investment, and control expenditures throughout the University.

The process for developing these plans (the University-wide plan and the plans from the colleges and units) was comprehensive and inclusive, guided by the Three-Year Action Plan Steering Committee drawn from throughout the University. In conjunction with the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Strategic Planning, the following “Unifying Statement” was developed from the UA mission statement to establish an overall framework for the planning effort:

*“We are a regional public university committed to developing knowledgeable, open-minded, and productive members of an increasingly diverse society who will be life-long learners. Building on our strengths, we provide a transformative education to students, complemented by cutting-edge research and innovative engagement with the public and private sectors.”*

Four priorities guide this Action Plan:

**1. Increase Success of Our Students**

- Provide high quality instruction, opportunities for career preparation, and excellent support services to achieve steady and timely academic progress toward graduation.

**2. Emphasize Academic Distinctiveness**

- Offer in-demand degree programs and those that make UA distinctive; conduct high-quality, focused research in specific areas of strength; and, engage with the community in driving the economic development of the region through strong public-private partnerships.

**3. Generate Additional Revenue**

- Increase student recruitment and persistence to degree, fundraising, research grants with limited or no University subsidy and additional external auxiliary funding.

**4. Continue to Improve Efficiency and Effectiveness**

- Operate academic, academic support and auxiliary units as effectively and efficiently as possible, including possible outsourcing of some operational functions, and ensure efficient delivery of courses and degree programs through more effective scheduling, academic administration and unit reorganization.

The results of this Three-Year Action Plan will be used to guide the preparation of the University’s FY 2019–2020 budget and inform the upcoming presidential search. The intent is to continually evaluate progress of the plan on an annual basis, make needed adjustments and continue with that process. Our new president will then have a plan and a planning process that can be modified or changed as she or he settles in to the presidency.

What follows is a list of tactics UA will pursue to advance these priorities over the next three years. These tactics are primarily drawn from the action plans developed by the deans and vice presidents, which in turn are rooted in relevant unit action plans. Given the diversity of these plans, the tactics are necessarily described in some general terms. However, in operational terms, the specific details of the tactics will be found in the relevant college,

divisional, and unit action plans. The implementation of the tactics will occur through normal administrative channels. If such tactics require changes in policy, such changes will occur through normal shared governance practices.

*The approach and actions to be taken will result in changes within the University, and adapting to change can be difficult. However, it is imperative that we **do** adapt so we can move forward. It is abundantly clear that we cannot just continue what we have been doing – however successful it may have been in the past.*

### **Priority #1: Increase Success of Our Students**

**Over the next three years, The University of Akron will increase student success by providing high quality instruction and excellent services so that students can achieve steady progress to graduation.**

- a. *UA will deploy academic and academic support personnel to increase undergraduate student persistence rates by 1% each year; retention rates by 3% each year; and graduation rates by 2% per year.*
- UA will employ scheduling analytics to offer classes in and across semesters to streamline paths to graduation.
  - UA will move all bachelor's degrees to 120 credits, unless explicitly prohibited by accreditors, to reduce costs to students and time to graduation.
  - UA will review and revise required course sequences to increase student success without compromising academic standards.
  - UA will review and revise course prerequisites and degree requirements to streamline paths to graduation.
  - UA will review and revise course offerings so that degree requirements can be met via online and hybrid courses, and so that credit may be obtained for previous learning experiences.
  - UA will consider efforts to revise foreign language requirements for undergraduates in natural science fields.

- UA will continue to follow its undergraduate admissions rule which will improve the success of our diverse student body as well as enhance our academic reputation
  - Consistent with college action plans, UA will implement the 2019 Undergraduate Enrollment plan regarding persistence, retention, and graduation.
- b. *UA will provide excellent student services, including providing intentional advising, prompt and effective attention to inquiries and timely assistance with personal distress situations, as well as spurring additional student engagement.*
- UA will require all undergraduate students with less than 60 credits completed to meet with their college advisor before registering for classes.
  - UA college and faculty advisors will monitor all student pre-majors and ensure that such students expeditiously find a major in which they can succeed – including a smooth transition to another degree program when appropriate.
  - UA and each college will expeditiously identify students struggling with course work and deploy faculty, tutors, study teams, peer mentors, and other resources to help these students complete their classes.
  - Consistent with college action plans, UA will review and revise direct admit criteria for admission to undergraduate degree programs to ensure that admitted students are adequately prepared to succeed in the program.
  - Consistent with college action plans, UA will continue to improve college-based student advising, with special attention to at-risk students.
  - UA will expand the scope and impact of UA's Choose Ohio First comprehensive student support model, including summer bridge programming, to Collegiate Success, pre-Engineering, and Underrepresented Scholarship student cohorts.
  - UA will help increase the success of first generation, low income, underrepresented and students with disabilities on campus.

- UA will identify students facing personal challenges and provide wrap-around support.
  - UA will expand learning communities as a means to immerse students in areas of personal interest and academic pursuit.
  - UA will continue to stress the importance of student engagement in campus life to enhance persistence and retention, being attentive to diverse cultures and experiences.
  - UA will create opportunities for seamless integration of transfer students into academic and campus life.
  - UA will help students who need remedial and/or developmental coursework at the time of admission through co-requisite and other methods.
- c. *UA will increase student interactions with full-time faculty in the classroom, especially in undergraduate general education and required courses.*
- UA will optimize class size to ensure quality interactions between full-time faculty and students, especially freshmen and sophomores, both in-class and out-of-class.
  - UA will optimize the type and number of elective courses to balance the instruction of required and high demand courses with the ability to provide academically distinctive programs.

## **Priority #2: Emphasize Academic Distinctiveness**

**During the next three years, The University of Akron will pursue academic distinctiveness with new and revised degree programs, focused research excellence, and strong local partnerships.**

- a. *UA will create new and revised degree programs for emerging markets and careers, encouraging diversity in a changing marketplace.*
- UA will focus course and degree offerings in areas of strong competitive advantage, student interest, and instructional capacity.
  - UA will develop and implement new degrees in areas of high demand as well as new interdisciplinary initiatives, such as global and pre-med studies.
  - UA will offer in-demand bachelor's degrees at Wayne College and other satellite locations in coordination with main campus programs.
  - UA's LeBron James Family Foundation College of Education will increase its emphasis on urban pre-service teacher preparation, generate impact via the new Urban STEM Center and pursue other promising opportunities.
  - UA will develop internal and external "2+2" degree programs, linking in-demand associate degrees to bachelor's degrees.
  - Consistent with college action plans, units will work with the Graduate School to develop professional master's degrees to attract self-paying students.
    - Each Ph.D. program at UA will revise its curriculum, if necessary, so students will earn an appropriate masters degree once they advance to doctoral candidacy.
    - Consistent with college action plans, UA will develop and implement a plan for recruiting high-quality graduate students with assistance from the Graduate School.
  - UA will regularly review and revise existing degrees to improve quality and outcomes via a regular multi-year cycle of program review.
  - UA will expand experiential learning and research opportunities to all undergraduate degree programs.
  - Consistent with college action plans, UA will support faculty efforts to move as many courses as possible online.
  - Consistent with college action plans, UA will support faculty efforts to use open educational resources in as many courses as possible to increase textbook affordability.

- b. *UA will expand cutting-edge research in focused areas of strength, including higher external funding, generation of intellectual property, and scholarly reputation.*
- UA will initiate new clusters of research activity, including “Major Research Ventures” (an interdisciplinary team of faculty) and “Faculty Research Ventures” (a single faculty member), to expand research funding.
  - UA will develop master research agreements with business and industry to conduct research where the ownership of the intellectual property generated is negotiable consistent with the level of funding.
  - Through the University of Akron Research Foundation (UARF), UA will expand its activities to support new research ventures as well as continue to foster the commercialization of UA intellectual property.
  - UA will implement new policies for external research grants and contracts, including charging faculty time and tuition for graduate students as direct costs when allowed by the granting agency.
  - Within Ph.D. programs, UA will seek an appropriate balance of doctoral students who are UA-funded teaching assistants and those who are externally-funded research assistants.
  - Each unit at UA will develop and obtain approval for a faculty workload policy linking assigned time for research to discipline-appropriate research productivity, levels of external funding, and research with students.
- c. *UA will maintain existing and seek new external partnerships to support workforce development, technical innovation, economic growth, and improved quality of life.*
- UA will participate in the implementation of the *Elevate Akron* plan for regional economic development, partnering with the Chamber of Commerce, City of Akron, and County of Summit.
  - UA will strengthen its partnership with Bounce, including the possible relocation of appropriate UA personnel and activities to the downtown facility.
  - UA will continue to work with the City of Akron and County of Summit on safety and community development in the Exchange Street Corridor.
  - UA will expand its partnerships in the region to include workforce development and the management of intellectual property.
  - UA will continue to work with the State of Ohio administration and legislators to keep higher education affordable, maximize our State Share of Instruction payments and focus on job and career readiness.
  - UA will contribute to the implementation of the Northeast Ohio Regional Higher Education Compact to make public higher education more collaborative and less duplicative in the region.

- UA will continue existing and seek new educational partnerships with private and public entities.
- UA will continue to cultivate relationships on- and off-campus with entities whose mission is to serve minority and underserved populations and to advance the University's commitment to Inclusive Excellence.
- UA will continue to monitor federal legislation and seek new federal research funds.
- UA will expand existing and seek new relationships with area hospitals, including Akron Children's Hospital, Summa Health System, and Cleveland Clinic Akron General Hospital.
- UA will expand dual enrollment agreements (such as Direct Connect with Stark State College) to other Northeast Ohio Compact community colleges.
- UA will carry out its "sister university" partnerships with the Akron Public Schools, and seek to expand these relationships to include partnerships for visual and performing arts programs.
- UA will maximize the impact of its partnership with the LeBron James Family Foundation, including the "I Promise School" and the "I Promise Institute".
- UA will continue its strong partnerships with local arts institutions (such as the Akron Art Museum, ArtsNow, and the Civic Theater), educational groups (such as Summit Education Initiative, ConxusNEO, Leadership Akron, and Neighborhood Leadership), non-profit organizations (such as United Way and the Salvation Army), and civic institutions (such as Downtown Akron Partnership, Akron Zoo, and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park).

### **Priority #3: Generate Additional Revenue**

**During the next three years, The University of Akron will expand existing and seek new sources of revenue, including new student recruitment, fundraising, and funding for research and auxiliaries.**

- a. *UA will expand its recruitment of high quality and diverse students at all levels, with an emphasis on increasing net tuition revenue.*
  - UA will implement the 2019 Undergraduate Enrollment plan with regard to recruitment of first-time and transfer students, with the assistance of the colleges and other units consistent with their action plans.
  - UA will maximize transfer enrollment and success through Direct Connect and other dual enrollment programs.
  - UA will initiate additional efforts to recruit more College Credit Plus students to enroll at UA by creating stronger connections between the students and the University.



- UA will strategically improve rankings and continue to meet accreditation expectations in the colleges
- b. *UA will expand development activities to raise additional funds for student scholarships, endowed chairs, campus facilities, and programs.*
- UA's Development Department will expand its fundraising efforts (targeting an 8% to 10% increase per year), with the assistance of the colleges and other units consistent with their action plans.
  - UA will lay the groundwork for a new fundraising campaign in conjunction with the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of the University.
  - UA fundraising efforts will focus on obtaining gifts that offset costs currently borne by the General Fund, including scholarships, endowed professorships, and facilities.
- c. *UA will increase funding generated by auxiliary units, including athletics, residence halls, and student and recreation centers.*
- UA's Athletic Department will implement a three-year plan to reduce the financial draw from the General Fund by reducing costs (\$3 million over the next three years) and generating additional revenues (\$5 million over the next three years).
  - UA Residence Life and Housing will increase revenues by placing more students in the residence halls, including student-athletes.
  - UA will continue to investigate and pursue potential opportunities to monetize physical assets and/or revenue streams. The physical asset investigations will include sale, sale/leaseback arrangements, and other means with the intended purpose of first retiring outstanding bonded debt, followed by providing a source of capital and/or recurring cash flows for the University. The monetization of residence life and housing, recreation center, parking, football stadium and field house, and the University's power plant and its related infrastructure will initially be investigated.

#### **Priority #4: Continue to Improve Efficiency and Effectiveness**

**The University of Akron will continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the operation of academic, academic support, and auxiliary units.**

- a. *UA will continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of courses and degree programs.*

- UA will centralize where appropriate the deans' office personnel in key services, including information technology, development, marketing, compliance and budgeting.
- UA will significantly reduce the number of low enrollment course offerings.
- UA will significantly increase the speed of curricular approvals.
- UA will reorganize University Libraries (UL), in keeping with UL recommendations, and continue to use data analyses to strategically allocate expenditures for materials.
- UA Office of Enrollment Management will implement plans to reduce the amount of General Fund scholarships.
- UA will assess the effectiveness and efficiency of academic support programs, such as the English Language Institute, Confucius Institute, and the Office of Multicultural Development.
- Consistent with the recommendations of the Administrative Activities Review, UA will review current levels of staffing and resources in the deans' offices and Office of Academic Affairs.

*b. UA will continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of academic support services, as well as the activities of auxiliary units.*

- UA will centralize, where appropriate, administrative personnel in key services, including information technology, development, marketing and communications, compliance and budgeting.
- Human Resources will conduct a comprehensive review of UA's employee classification system.
- Information Technology will evaluate the migration to a cloud-based Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.
- UA will consider joining Dining and Residence Life and Housing within the same administrative area to create additional savings and synergies.
- Consistent with the recommendations from Academic Activities Review, UA will analyze current levels of staffing and resources in all academic support and auxiliary units.
- UA will explore the feasibility of establishing centralized management of conference and meeting facilities.